

Saskatchewan's independent newsmagazine

BRIARPATCH

Volume 28, Number 3

April 1999

\$3.00



★ Inside the United
Alternative Convention

★ Saskatchewan
Election '99

★ School of the Americas

★ Rogues & Heroes



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RECENT VICTORIES



Canadian activists should be proud of recent victories over the corporate agenda. Citizens formed coalitions across this country and the rest of the world to oppose the MAI. This agreement was supposed to remain a secret, but after activists found out about it, world-wide protests derailed these plans. While the MAI in its present form may be dead, a different version may very likely rear its ugly head in the future. But the lessons we have learned to oppose the MAI will help us in that future fight.

Other victories include the banning of Bovine Growth Hormone in milk in Canada, and the kibosh of the bank mergers, which would have consolidated the grip of the Canadian financial establishment. The message is clear: We can win if we organize.

LUBICON LOBBY CAMPAIGN



After more than 60 years of failed talks, lengthy court battles and public education campaigns, the Lubicon Cree Nation in northern Alberta have yet to achieve a fair and just land rights settlement. The latest round of negotiations with the federal government began in July 1998 and ac-

cording to Lubicon advisor Fred Lennarson, the Lubicon are becoming increasingly concerned by the lack of substantive progress.

The Lubicon need your support to improve the chances of a positive outcome in this latest round of talks. Contact Nancy Graham, Lubicon Lobby Campaign coordinator, 153 Laurier Avenue East, Ottawa ON K1N 6N8; phone (613) 526-3871; fax (613) 526-9093; Email: grabia@istar.ca to receive a lobby campaign information package.

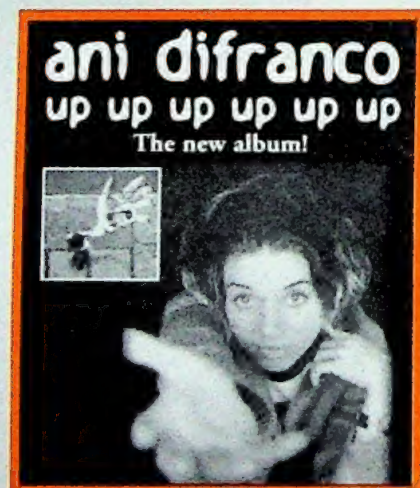
ALTERNATIVE PRESS

No doubt you've seen the Best of the Alternative Press (BOAP) two-page ads in *Briarpatch* and other alternative Canadian magazines. According to a BOAP staffer, *Briarpatch* is the most requested magazine among the 19 mags they represent.

ART RAFFLE

Ten artists from across Canada and the U.S. have donated their art to *Briarpatch* for our annual art raffle. This latest CD from Ani DiFranco is just one of the many prizes. Subscribers will be sent tickets to sell to your friends, neighbours, and co-workers.

The first art raffle began in 1983 and has been one of our major forms of fund-raising. Please sell as many tickets as you can so we can continue to keep publishing. For those of you who hate selling raffle tickets, simply return them in the postage-paid envelope provided.



MAY DAY BENEFIT

Briarpatch and the Regina & District Labour Council are having a May Day Benefit featuring the Wilma Groenen Blues Band. For more information, see the outside back cover of the magazine. If you want to buy or sell advance tickets, please call our office at 525-2949.

GARAGE SALE

Once again, it's spring cleaning time. This year, instead of adding to the mountains of garbage, donate your "treasures" to *Briarpatch* for our spring sale. Phone 525-2949 so we can pick up your books, records (you remember them), old china and kitchen sinks.

Briarpatch is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide an open forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

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George Manz



Rich & Poor

The richest one-fifth of the world's people consumes 86 percent of all goods and services, while the poorest one-fifth consumes just 1.3 percent. The richest one-fifth consumes 45 percent of all meat and fish, 58 percent of all energy used, and 84 percent of all paper, has 74 percent of all telephone lines and owns 87 percent of all vehicles.

Of the 4.4 billion people in the developing countries, nearly three-fifths lack access to safe sewers, one-third have no access to clean water, one-quarter do not have adequate housing, and one-fifth have no access to modern health services of any kind.

The world's 225 richest individuals (of whom 60 are Americans with total assets of \$311 billion) have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion - equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 percent of the entire world's population. The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries.

North Americans spend \$8.5 billion a year on cosmetics - \$2.5

billion more than the estimated annual amount needed to provide basic education for everyone in the world.

Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food - \$2 billion more than the annual amount needed to provide basic health and nutrition for the world's population.

Europeans spend \$11 billion a year on ice cream - \$2 billion more than the annual amount needed to provide clean water and safe sewers for the world's population.

The additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education and health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all, and clean water and safe sewers for all is estimated to be roughly \$40 billion a year - less than 4 percent of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world.

Source: The United Nations 1998 Human Development Report. This article was originally published in CCPA Monitor, a monthly publication of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Pay Equity

Groups call on the Saskatchewan government to pass pay equity legislation.

by Beth Smillie

A coalition of groups representing labour, women and community-based agencies called on the Saskatchewan government to take action to improve the lives of working women by passing pay equity legislation. The request was made by the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union on March 8, International Women's Day.

Although the NDP promised pay equity legislation eight years ago, Saskatchewan remains one of the few jurisdictions in the country without a pay equity law. The provincial government's pay equity policy, implemented two years ago, is restricted to specific employers in the public sector. It does not include the health sector, libraries, municipalities, the retail sector, community-based agencies, school boards or other female-dominated workplaces.

"Wage discrimination continues to be the day-to-day reality for the majority of people working in female-dominated jobs in this province," says Aina Kagis, chair of the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan.

Statistics Canada figures show Saskatchewan women, working full-time, ranked ninth among the provinces in average annual earnings in 1996, a drop from eighth place the year



RWDSU members Joan Bisson and Sandra Morin.
photo: George Manz

before. Saskatchewan women also ranked eighth in the ratio of female to male wages (commonly known as the wage gap) in 1996, making only 70 cents on average for every dollar earned by men in the province, or nearly \$11,000 less a year.

Citing the Coalition's new campaign slogan, Kagis says "There ought to be a law" to help women achieve pay equity. The campaign, which includes postcards, billboards, newspaper ads and leaflets, was launched earlier in March in Saskatoon with a rally in front of the Premier's office.

Without legislation, the human rights route is the only option available to most women seeking redress to pay discrimination. And it's fraught with problems, Kagis explains.

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union's attempt to use the human rights route to achieve pay

equity at Safeway is one example. Although Regina Safeway cashier Barbara Nuttall (nee Hall) and her union filed a pay equity complaint with the Human Rights Commission in 1992, the case has been tied up in legal arguments.

"It's a sad comment that we're still fighting for wage equality at Safeway seven years later," says Sandra Morin, the union's chief steward for Safeway workers in Regina. "And the issue of wage discrimination at Safeway, the heart of the complaint, hasn't even been discussed," she adds.

Morin says the government should be enacting legislation so women don't have to go through this frustrating process, which only appears to benefit lawyers and judges.

Beth Smillie is a member of the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan.

Pay equity

=

equal pay for work of equal value.

It's a simple equation.

Pay equity means equality. It's badly needed in the province of Saskatchewan, where working women earn seventy cents for every dollar earned by a man. Men who work in female-dominated professions suffer, too.

We are the 17,000 members of SGEU, serving you in adult education, health, retail and regulatory services, community-based public services, government and your provincial crown corporations. Together, we're fighting for pay equity through legislation and fair wages – for our members and for all Saskatchewan working people.

SGEU 
Working Together For Saskatchewan

Slash & Burn at the CBC

*The real story behind the dismantling of
Canada's public broadcaster.*

by Armand Roy

Cuts, strikes, increased business programming content, more stock market reports, less investigative reporting, less regional programming, reduction in quality. These are just symptoms of what is really happening at the CBC.

The story begins with the election of the Mulroney Tories in 1984. For years the private broadcast industry wanted a piece of the CBC pie. They had lobbied the federal government, claiming unfair competition. It wasn't until Mulroney's Conservatives began to listen to their cries with enthusiasm that things began to change. The result was a budget cut to the CBC in 1985, the first of many cuts to follow.

At the time Canada was debating the Free Trade Agreement. Many Canadians feared the American onslaught. Canadian nationalism had reached a new crescendo. Yet, the Mulroney government ignored the pleas and pressed Free Trade forward. Culture was supposedly excluded from the agreement. Yet they cut the CBC's budget, while behind the scene they partied, pampered and assured private broadcasters and American cultural interests.

The years that followed were strewn with the debris of laid off employees and program reductions. The final Tory blow was a \$180 million cut from Finance Minister Don Mazankowski's 1991 budget.



The more things change...

When Jean Chrétien's Liberal government was elected in 1992, they promised stable funding and a renewed CBC. Instead, they proceeded to slash and burn like never before. By 1996 they announced cuts which brought the CBC's budget and personnel to half of its 1985 levels.

CBC's unions fought hard to protect public broadcasting from the axe. They planned rallies and worked with community groups, trying to bring the plight of the CBC to public attention. In negotiations the unions made unprecedented concessions to assist the corporation to deal with the government's deficit cutting onslaught.

So why have both Conservative and Liberal governments slashed the CBC so severely?

In recent years Canada has seen tremendous concentration of media ownership. Conrad Black has a virtual

monopoly in the newspaper industry. His control of over 70 percent of the daily newspapers in Canada, *Maclean's* magazine and the Canadian Press Wire Service have made his media influence overwhelming. At the same time the mergers and buyouts in private broadcasting have brought the industry down to four main players - Baton, CanWest Global, WIC and CHUM TV. Even the latest cable channels are all affiliates or subsidiaries of these monopolies.

Canada is the only country in the industrialized world which has no limitations to media ownership. Even the United States limits control to 20 percent of the market and does not allow cross media ownership.

Minister of Heritage Sheila Copps recently announced the removal of \$100 million slated solely for CBC productions and replaced it with bids from all broadcasters and producers.

She explained the lobby by private broadcasters had convinced her to make the decision. Yet this lobby had always been present. Why are their views and wishes so important now? After all, the CBC had accomplished the previous cuts and were being told that stable funding was now in place.

In 1999 CBC management's negotiators forced a strike by tabling a final offer of 0, 0 and 0 over three years to the corporation's employees, members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP). Publicly they stated the offer was 0, 3 and 3.

Back in 1996, the CBC's unions, the Friends of Public Broadcasting and the Council of Canadians lobbied federal Liberal MPs to save the CBC. The results were encouraging. The large public outcry at the possible devolution of the CBC forced over 100 of the Liberal MPs to display open support for the CBC and promised they would fight for its future. They seemed sincere in their resolve. Yet the slashing continued.

So if the MPs have no say, and the public has no say, who does?

Under the Conservatives, Gerard Viellieux was appointed president of the CBC. Viellieux had been Trudeau's highest ranking bureaucrat. He had been head of the Treasury Board and was well versed on the inner workings of government. During his reign as President of the CBC, he formed partnerships with Power Corporation for shared production of Newsworld International. Power Corporation already was in business with the CBC through its subsidiary, Great-West Life Insurance. Viellieux resigned from the CBC in 1994, and joined Power Corporation as head of its communications division. Interestingly, he remained President and CEO of CBC for a full three weeks while already working for Power Corporation.

He was replaced by Anthony Manera, whose genuine devotion to the CBC was legendary. He truly wanted to renew the CBC. He took profound steps to change the way the CBC operated. He received respect among employees for his innovative style and passion for public broadcasting. This was his undoing. He was betrayed by the 1996 Liberal budget cut. He immediately resigned, realizing he was really overseeing the undoing of the corporation and public broadcasting.

Perrin Beatty, a Conservative star from the Mulroney era, was appointed by the Chrétien Liberals to replace Manera. Beatty's initiatives have brought confrontation to new levels within the CBC. He and Guylaine Saucier, a long-time private broadcaster appointed as the Chair of the Board of Directors, were instrumental in leading the charge to further dismantle the CBC. Another interesting appointment was Louise Tremblay as Vice-President of Human Resources and Industrial Relations. Her previous employer was Power Corporation.

Another interesting member of the CBC Board of Directors is Roy Heenan, a prominent lawyer in Montreal. His firm, Heenan Blakie, is contracted to handle labour relations for the CBC. Heenan Blakie has Pierre Trudeau on retainer to their firm. Roy Heenan's partner is Peter Blakie, former chief campaign manager for Brian Mulroney.

But the real story points directly to the office of The Prime Minister. Jean Chrétien's daughter is married to the son of Paul Desmarais, the principal owner of Power Corporation. Power Corporation has holdings in broadcasting, satellite technology, property management and insurance, just to name a few.

Desmarais' power and influence is unsurpassed. In 1976 a member of Trudeau's Cabinet introduced an ill-fated private member's bill to limit media concentration. After Desmarais protested this matter with Trudeau, the member was removed from Cabinet and subsequently resigned.

Each privatization that has occurred at the CBC since the mid-1980s has been linked to Power Corporation or the Desmarais family. Desmarais has long admired the ability of the CBC to reach 95 percent of the Canadian population. He has maintained a keen interest in the CBC's extensive transmission system.

Jean Chrétien's total dislike for the CBC is often blamed on two events: the Quebec Referendum and his now famous Town Hall broadcast. Chrétien claims that Radio-Canada in Quebec is infested with separatists and his solution is to diminish its influence. The Prime Minister claims his poor performance at the Town Hall broadcast was a result of planting people in the audience. Neither claim has been substantiated. Looking for more ways to discredit the CBC, the APEC scandal and its subsequent reports led to Chrétien's intervention to have CBC reporter Terry Milewski removed. But what are his real reasons for his disdain for the CBC?

Chrétien's government introduced Bill C-44 in 1998 which was designed to place direct state control over the CBC. This will allow the government to dissolve or privatize the CBC whenever it wishes.

At the beginning of the current dispute at the CBC, Gail Lem, CEP Vice-President for Media Workers stated: "It certainly looks like the CBC management is being directed to dismantle the organization so it can be sold off, bit by bit."

It appears that for the greed and power of two men, Canada is about to lose what is left of a once proud, internationally recognized, award-winning public broadcaster.

Armand Roy is a freelance graphic designer, part-time CBC employee and a CEP member.

“Stop Fighting Over Us & Just Organize Us”

That's the message young people are sending to unions.

by Cara Banks

Young Canadian workers want unions to start working together to unionize youth in crappy jobs and give them strong first contracts. With only one in ten young workers organized, they say it's time to “stop the body count” and give workers desperate for unions protection in the workplace.

In recent months I've attended two major conferences about young workers and unions. The first, in November 1998, was a national conference put on by the Centre for Research on Work and Society at York University. Saskatchewan sent 19 people, many of whom were unorganized workers.

We made up the second largest delegation after Ontario.

The second conference, in January 1999, was put on by the Youth Standing Committee of the Ontario Federation of Labour. The fact that the OFL's organizing conference was about young workers, and that a Youth Standing Committee actually exists at the executive level was very exciting for all involved.

Both conferences held many productive strategizing sessions about the successes and problems with organizing young workers. We heard presentations from young people who had organized their workplaces, from the folks who went after McDonald's, Starbucks and other tough organizing battles. This was inspirational!

We also discussed at long length why young workers are difficult to unionize: they're clustered in the service sector where some of the worst bosses reside; they're often transient, part-time, work multiple jobs; many don't know or understand the labour movement; the list goes on. Young workers responded that like it or not, this is the current state of jobs. Union leaders need to commit to organizing workplaces where young people work and to



Saskatchewan delegates to the York University youth conference.

building unions that make room for youth in structures and leadership positions.

Several young workers told their leaders that the way to organize youth is to train young organizers. When someone who can relate to their lifestyle and struggle approaches young workers, they will be far more likely to be interested in a union. This seems to me a fairly logical point, along the lines of “if you want to organize a workplace of mainly Aboriginal workers, an Aboriginal organizer is recommended.” This is not meant as some sort of hard and fast rule, of course, but is instead a gentle way of saying, “Please train us to be organizers and we'll make it worth your while.”

Sadly we heard from three different union organizers/leaders who said that the social identity of the organizer is irrelevant. They said, “I don't need someone like me to organize someone like me.” The not so surprising thing is that all three of these comments came from older white men.

Another common remark from senior trade unionists was that in order to attract young people, the labour move-

ment needs to tap into the commercialized style of youth culture. Many of the young workers felt this line didn't give young people enough credit for being discerning and intelligent consumers of pop culture. One of the most interesting speakers was Nrinder Nann, CLC national youth rep. She argued that labour doesn't just need a face lift, or image change, they need a cultural change. This means a workers' culture that fights for young people's issues.

In other words, putting flashy ads on TV and writing rock union songs isn't gonna do it: to attract young people, start or keep doing something about the issues that directly affect them. Work with young people to solve their problems.

By far the most interesting aspect of the conferences was the very passionate question and answer sessions with Canada's union leaders. Young workers are getting organized and have some serious demands for the older generation of trade unionists. Union leaders obviously understand that young workers and their concerns cannot be ignored. After all, many of them showed up at the conferences to participate, or at least to answer questions.

To their credit, some union spokespeople sounded downright enthusiastic about organizing youth, often because they'd seen a recent rise in youth activism in their

unions or had some recent successes in organizing young workplaces. Actually, most of the spokespeople had to at least admit "young people are the future of the labour movement"; it got a little cliché after awhile but we weren't gonna argue. There was a very hopeful feeling that we had some allies at the top.

Some leaders, however, just weren't ready to make room for young workers in the labour movement. There was a real tone of condescension coming from a few leaders - along the line of "Young people don't listen to their elders"; "Young people have low attention spans"; "You know I was young once saying the same things to my union leaders" (they just don't seem to understand that when they say that, they're basically admitting that when they made it into office they forgot what it was that they were supposed to be changing).

Probably the most contentious issue, however, was union cooperation around organizing young people. During the strategy sessions, young people brought up this idea again and again. For example, some suggested that in the retail industry, a few different unions could divide up the stores in a mall and blitz an entire mall together. Another good idea was having an inter-union emergency team that would come out and help organizing drives that were in trouble (a team like that would be great on picket lines too). Of course it was also suggested that unions share information about employers, workplaces and potential drives. The need for industry or sector-wide organizing where workplaces are divided among unions came up again and again.

Another major focus was exploring the idea of organizing university and other post-secondary students. The majority of these students already work at least part-time, and know the problems with today's workplace. There's also an active student movement ready to join forces with labour.

Campuses house thousands of people struggling to find decent work and who would be directly accessible through a union-run worker information centre or some sort of similar setup. Why not organize locals of students, either as actual or associate members? It could work if unions were willing to cooperate with one another and learn to mediate their jurisdictional disputes.

Overall, there was no shortage of ideas about how unions can work together to organize young people, but there was occasionally evidence of a lack of political will.

We got some awfully negative responses to the idea of inter-union cooperation. We heard things like, "You just don't understand the reality of what it's like to organize" (despite the fact that many young workers there had experience organizing young workers). One of my personal favourites was one leader telling us we had to read our labour history to understand why unions can't work to-

**Friends of
Samantha Goldsworthy
Misanchuk
of Saskatoon,
have established a
Trust Fund on her behalf.
Samantha was seriously
injured in a hit and run in
February in Victoria, BC.
Contributions are greatly
appreciated and can be
made at any Credit Union
in Saskatchewan
(Account #10041267 in
trust for Samantha
Goldsworthy Misanchuk).**

gether. Several times we heard the rather empty "Unions have always competed, therefore they always will." Young workers were told they were looking for a utopia that will never happen.

There was a mood of dissatisfaction with these responses to say the least. The way I see it, being in a union means learning how to cooperate with your co-workers. It's a crucial part of deciding what issues will go to the bargaining table, what strategies will be taken in fighting the boss, and which activities the local will support. Yet somehow union leaders think they are exempt from having to work out some of their differences with other unions. Why are some of our top dogs scared to take the idea of worker cooperation and solidarity to its highest level?

Granted some of this "healthy competition" among unions has been going on for decades, but that doesn't mean it's inevitable for all time. It's time for unions to look at the many interests they have in common, namely getting the most exploited and underpaid workers unionized and activated. When unions start from the bottom, where there's a lot of young people, they will build a bigger and more energetic labour movement. They will also send a powerful message to corporations about what workers as a united force will and will not tolerate.

It's time for unions to "get over it," as one young woman said, and start working together. Unions working

together means making sure that they all benefit from actions taken together, just as unions themselves are about making sure every employee in the workplace benefits from a collective agreement. It won't be painless, nor should it be. Fair and inclusive decision-making is never simple, and sharing resources may present some tactical difficulties. With the commitment to make an inter-union experiment work, it can be done.

It's time for unions to have some serious dialogue about cooperation versus competition. There's so many workers that need unions desperately: young workers, workers of colour, immigrant workers, Aboriginal workers. There's plenty of us to go around.

Young workers at these conferences told us that they joined the labour movement when they saw that it was active on anti-racist issues, on women's issues, and that it was working with the student movement. Young workers believe in alliances and coalitions: they will not be attracted to unions that won't share power with one another and with its young people.

Let's hope union leaders are listening to young workers and aren't afraid to inject a little utopia into the labour movement.

Cara Banks is optimistic about the future of the labour movement.



Stop Corporate Control

March 31st

DAY OF ACTION

For more information, call 586-8811 Extention 2

UK STUDENTS' UNION

The Virtual University

Workers and the corporate reorganization of education.

by Bruce Allen



Arbitrary university tuition fee increases by corporate-dominated Boards of Governors are widely cited as evidence that the direction of post-secondary education conforms to the corporate agenda. Nonetheless, there are other corporate-inspired developments on university campuses that are even more ominous and much more socially significant.

Outsourcing

The same corporate work reorganization strategies being deployed against autoworkers are being unleashed on university campuses. For example, course designs are being standardized for universities to outsource work to off campus people for a flat fee. Once these outside academic workers finish designing these courses, the end products become the property of the university. The workers become disposable.

The same is true for the growing legion of part-time faculty hired by

universities on a contract basis. These part-timers are often employed for about nine months and then move on to another campus. Their employment is frequently terminated shortly before they qualify for benefit packages.

The University of Phoenix is on the cutting edge of this trend. It has a full-time faculty of just 45 and a part-time faculty of about 3,400. The University of Phoenix's work-force conforms exactly to the type of work-force advocated by the leading proponents of agile manufacturing.

Virtual Universities

The University of Phoenix is an example of a virtual university. The concept of the virtual university conforms exactly to the agile concept of the virtual enterprise. Both concepts embody the ideas of Steven Goldman of the Agility Forum based at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Agility Forum is an industry-led and U.S. government-backed

clearinghouse for developing and deploying strategies designed to make U.S. corporations as globally competitive as possible by employing the latest advances in information technology.

Virtual universities are highly flexible institutions typically comprised of satellite campuses linked using computer software. They render costly facilities like libraries obsolete by encouraging students to access all of their source material via the Internet. Books become far less important to one's education. Workers employed in libraries become unnecessary.

Virtual universities promise to realize "anywhere, anytime learning." This means academic workers must be instantly and continuously accessible, according to David F. Noble of the National Coalition of Universities in the Public Interest. The work they perform is restructured accordingly and, as in a lean manufacturing system, they lose their autonomy in the work process, their hours of work increase, and the pace of work is stepped up.

Such developments reveal that academic workers are facing essentially the same kinds of attacks faced by workers in industries like auto. Academic and industrial workers must make common cause if we are going to stop the resulting corporate-driven race to the bottom for all working people.

Bruce Allen is an autoworker and a member of the Executive Board of CAW Local 199 in St. Catharines, Ontario.

REFORM *by any other name*



Inside the United Alternative Convention.

by David Robinson

The political right-wing, once known as the Reform Party of Canada, is undergoing a name change and makeover. But despite the new moniker and facelift, Reform by any other name will smell the same.

That's the one thing the "United Alternative" convention in Ottawa in February was about - it was a carefully scripted meeting of Reformers intent upon changing the name of their party. The outcome was never in doubt.

The Reform Party apparatchik had long concluded that in its current incarnation the party would never occupy the coveted seat of power. Burdened with the stigma of failing to make any breakthrough east of the Manitoba border in the last federal election and still languishing well behind the Liberals in the polls, Reform recognized the end was nigh. Preston Manning admitted as much at the convention in London last year when the United Alternative initiative was proposed. Reform needed a dramatic makeover, a kind of spiritual rebirth to broaden the base of the flock. And only an ostensibly new political party, that preached, on the surface at least, a more moderate message of fiscal and social conservatism would bring them that holy grail.

Friday, February 19

The Congress Centre in Ottawa was abuzz in anticipation of the first keynote speaker, Alberta's Ralph Klein, the rotund darling of fiscal belt-tighteners and program slashers everywhere. Scattered among the 1,500 delegates were 700 or so rank-and-file Reformers and pockets of provincial Tories, B.C. Liberals (Reformers by any other measure), Saskatchewan Party faithful (ditto), as well as members of some fringe political parties: some followers of the Christian Heritage Party, a few Libertarians, and even some old guard Western separatists. Despite the constant spin about the diversity and youthfulness of the crowd, from where I stood I could see only a hall full of older, white men.

After some self-congratulatory opening remarks from co-chairs Deborah Grey of Reform and Ontario Tory cabinet minister Tony Clement, the great Klein was enthusiastically welcomed. Klein's speech, delivered in painfully dull monotones, was intended to set a kinder and gentler tone for the convention. After struggling unsuccessfully to explain how the present flock of neo-conservatives are in any way different from the current gang of right-wingers disguised as federal Liberals, Klein ironically went to great lengths to stress the importance of accepting a dose of liberal moderation, particularly with respect to moral issues.

"We cannot, as those who adhere to be the party of minimum interference in the everyday lives of everyday Canadians, propose to interfere in the most personal of all decisions - those decisions that are matters of conscience," Klein declared.

But not even Klein could sweep that issue under the carpet. I could sense a mood of unease in the congregation. This would be an issue that couldn't be so easily repressed.

Saturday, February 20

Early in the morning a group of conservative pollsters gathered together to give the convention their views on how a new right-wing party could be sold to the Canadian public. Conrad Winn of *Compas* - the official pollster

of Conrad Black's *National Post*, a paper that has spilled more ink than any other to promote the UA - triumphantly announced that a new right party could win the next election.

But, there was a catch. It could do so only if it moderated some of its more extremist views, particularly on social policy.

Winn claimed that Canadians are happy with right-wing economics (really?), but are less impressed with the social conservatism and moral fundamentalism preached by Reform.

John Mykytyshyn, pollster to Ontario's Mike Harris, took a less diplomatic approach. He proudly proclaimed that his goal is to "elect as many right-wing candidates as possible and defeat the heathen communists." The Cold War imagery brought the crowd to its feet.

Following the panel, the delegates were ordered to get down to work. The first policy resolution of the UA, on economic and fiscal themes, was introduced calling for mandated balanced budgets, tax cuts, and priority pay-down of the debt. Again, I struggled to see how this was an "alternative" to what Paul Martin Jr. is serving up. Hell, given the recent changes at the NDP, even Alexa McDonough might sign on to that resolution.

But controversies did emerge, largely over wording. One part of the resolution called for governments to "foster an economic climate where a thriving entrepreneurial sector creates quality jobs for Canadians and recognizes the

needs of youth." Standard free market fare, right? Wrong. A successful amendment from the floor deleted the reference to young people.

"I didn't come here to give special status to any special interest group," one angry delegate shouted in support of the amendment.

With the discussion about to turn to social policy themes, I quickly grabbed a midday snack. As I took a cautious bite out of a stale egg salad sandwich, a thin-faced elderly gentleman shoved a cream-coloured pamphlet in my hand. Produced by the Committee for a Family-Friendly Alternative, the flyer features an Aryan-looking couple with their photogenic children posing against the backdrop of

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the rugged outdoors. Building on this triumphant imagery, inside we learn that the "Western tradition" of individualism and minimal government has to be the basis of a family-centred social policy. You see, it seems that today's "nanny state," has replaced the hunter Dad in providing for the security and comfort of families. This has emasculated families and "given government a pretext for the limitless invasion of civil society." Sounds like a massive government conspiracy. The truth is out there.

The self-professed family-friendly committee would go on to secure a minor victory in the long debate over social themes. The original resolution would be gutted as the social conservatives, ignoring Klein's call for moderation, clamoured at the microphones to introduce amendment after amendment.

The resolution's call for "support for families as an essential building block for a healthy society" was the first casualty. An elderly woman from the Reform Party explained that "support" implied some kind of government intervention or, worse yet, hand-outs. And, she explained, there is only one "family," not families plural. The resolution was rewritten to commit the UA to the "recognition of the family as the essential building block for a healthy society."

A second item in the resolution was discarded altogether. It called on provincial and federal governments to work together to ensure improved standards in education. That was seen to be yet another example of the intrusive nanny state, and besides, it's up to individuals alone to achieve standards, not for governments to impose them.

One brave soul, obviously confused about what convention he was attending, introduced an amendment calling on Ottawa to ensure national standards for health care. It was defeated 1,500 to 1.

But it prompted a young man in an undersized suit dotted with U.S. Republican party campaign buttons to suggest Medicare be given an unhealthy dose of free market medicine. "There's nothing wrong with charging user fees for health care," he proclaimed. "Say 10 or 20 dollars or maybe even 30." But why stop there? Why not \$100 or \$1,000?

Much to the chagrin of the humiliated delegate who

wanted national standards for Medicare, resolution 4 called for a massive decentralization of power from Ottawa to the provinces. Added to the resolution at the last moment was an amendment calling for an end to law being made by "judges and human rights bureaucrats." This was, of course, a very thinly veiled attack on pay equity and gay

and minority rights. Indeed, beneath the veneer of a new-found moderation and tolerance, the same old bigotry surfaced again and again.

Finally, the convention moved to debate the final and most critical resolution - developing a political action plan. Should delegates support joining forces under an existing party? Or merge the Reform and Conservatives. Or work on a local riding level to support common candidates. Or, as preferred by the convention's puppet-masters, should a new political party be formed?

Here, the proceedings were the most scripted and contrived. Instead of opening up debate to the floor, the organizers called on a number of invited speakers to present the options.

Former Conservative MP Gordon Gilchrist kicked off things with a dull and dreary call for uniting behind the Tory party, undeni-

ably the least popular option. The applause at the end was polite, but clearly forced.

Next, Reform MP John Reynolds launched a vicious attack on his former Tory colleagues and asked for delegates to throw their support behind Reform. The reception was better, but not overwhelming.

With each presentation, the momentum was building to its inevitable climax. The proposal to merge the two existing parties drew a more spirited reaction. Hal Jackman, former Ontario Tory MPP, drew even louder support for his preferred option of local unity initiatives.

Finally, the climax of the debate: Stockwell Day, Alberta's Finance Minister, speaking in support of creating a new political party. The funny thing was that Day never really presented an argument in favour of that option. Instead, he gave what was clearly a UA leadership speech, bashing the federal Liberals for not cutting taxes enough and for going easy on sexual predators. Day, with his boyish good looks and "family values" personae is Canada's answer to Dan Quayle and clearly wants to lead the new

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party. His deeply conservative views on abortion and gay rights are out of step with the Canadian public, but in front of this crowd he drew a standing ovation.

After a dinner break, former Union Nationale MNA Rodrigue Biron delighted delegates with his support of Reform's "third option" for national unity - which essentially involves dismantling the federal government. Too bad nobody told the convention that Biron, like earlier speaker Jean Allaire, has zero credibility in Quebec.

But Biron was needed to set the stage for the final actor in the day's performance, Reform leader Preston Manning. Manning's appearance represented the last so-

if we're going to unite the right," Crosbie continued. "For instance, has Reform changed its mind on the Triple E Senate? There's no problem on the economic side, we can agree on most things there. But many Reformers don't believe in policies for overcoming regional disparity. They don't want to be subsidizing economic development. Well, I can tell you that's a non-starter in the Maritimes."

As much as I hate to give him credit, Crosbie was right. The convention stayed away from any contentious issues. To debate those would have spelled the end of the UA from the start.

But back to the script. Perennial political opportunist John Nunziata was carefully chosen as the last delegate permitted to speak.

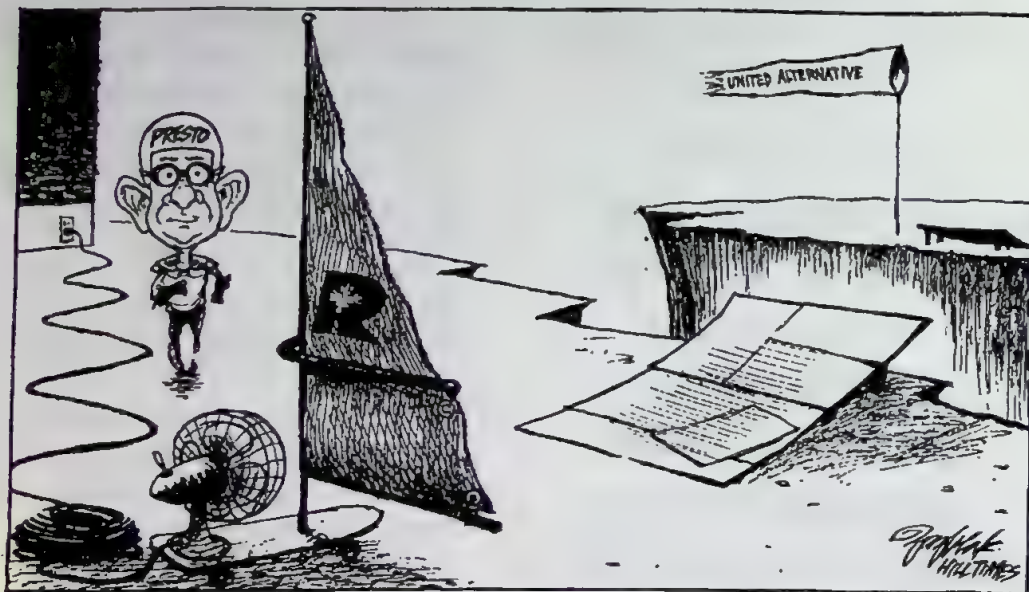
"Canada is ready for a new national party based on the principles of the Reform and the Conservative parties," the former Liberal and now independent MP claimed. "If you build it, they will come."

When the vote results were announced, there was no surprise. A plurality of delegates opted to build a new party. But will Canadians come to it?

What emerged from the convention is a new political party in name only. Without the participation of the

federal Progressive Conservatives, it's difficult to see how a Reform-driven and Reform-backed process would not lead to anything less than a carbon copy of Reform. Sure, there may be some minor tweaking here or there, but let's not be fooled by their spin doctors and pundits in the press into thinking that what emerges will be anything less than a far right political movement.

The UA initiative wasn't pinning much hope on forming an alliance with the federal Tories. As Crosbie's intervention at the convention shows, there's simply too much acrimony and division between the two parties. No, the real agenda here was to create a political alliance of Re-



liloquy in the drama, and it brought the house down.

There is a need for something new, Manning declared with his characteristic twang, but it must be something that unites the mind with the heart. It is, to borrow from the obscure ramblings of one-term U.S. President George Bush, a kinder and gentler conservatism.

Sunday, February 21

The final day was a denouement. There was a long debate on the last resolution, but the outcome was clear: Reform was dead, so long live the new Reform.

The only notable highlight was when former Tory cabinet minister John Crosbie finally made his way to the microphone to speak his mind.

"You've got this all ass-backward," Crosbie declared over the jeers of the delegates. "We had a united alternative for 100 years. It was called the Progressive Conservative Party and you went and disrupted that. Reformers thought we were too cozy to the French and weren't right-wing enough."

The boos and catcalls reached a fevered pitch. But Crosbie, ever defiant, pressed on.

"If you want to have a discussion, fine, but you haven't tackled the really important issues that have to be decided

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formers and hard-line provincial Tories to take a run at seat-rich Ontario in the next election. All the talk about moderation and respecting Quebec's differences was aimed at wooing Ontario voters. Even the public musings that Preston Manning has to go was meant to ease Ontarians who distrust his preachy, holier-than-thou message of salvation.

Will the UA succeed? It is still early to tell, but if the new party - let's call it Xerox Reform - cannot shed its respectability problem, it will fail no matter who the leader is. And even if it is successfully forged before the next election, where will it draw its support? Given the Liberal Party's love-in with the same right-wing platform as promoted by UA delegates, it's hard to see how anyone but Alberta survivalists and card-carrying members of the Fraser Institute would desert the Liberals and take up with a re-named regional reject. Still, if the Liberals continue to stumble in power, the UA may become the lightning rod for misplaced protest.

The great irony here is that any real alternative to the governing Liberals can't come from the right - Paul Martin likely has the largest right-wing following in the country. No, a real alternative - the only alternative - has to come from the left. And where is the left today? The federal NDP is dropping hints that it wants to follow the lead of Britain's Tony Blair and join the crowd on the right. If that's the case, there really will be little alternative.



I think there is an opportunity now for the Canadian left to seize the agenda. Neither Paul Martin nor his doppelgängers in the UA talk about full employment. Neither have a vision for a renewed social policy agenda. Neither have a plan for tackling poverty or improving the life chances of children and the most vulnerable Canadians. Neither have ideas for real tax reform and fairness. And neither are much interested in promoting greater equity in our society. So the question remains: where is the real alternative?

David Robinson is a policy analyst with the national office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <http://www.policyalternatives.ca>

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Saskatchewan Election '99

What's Left?

A survey and analysis of Left opinions.

by Joe Roberts

Briarpatch commissioned Joe Roberts to interview people from "the broad left" about what the progressive community should do in the upcoming provincial election. The sample included 40 people – young and old, in the NDP and out, workers and retired, men and women, farmers, trade unionists, students, artists, unemployed, life-long and recent arrivals. The article is a condensation of much more extensive opinions of respondents and analysis by the author.

For the last time in this millennium Saskatchewan voters will be asked to choose a new government. What does the left think of the options? Is there a common strategy? Could the left make a difference to the NDP? Is the threat of the Saskatchewan Party so great that they must be defeated at all cost? Is the New Green Alliance (NGA) the answer for the left?

Today there is no formation that constitutes the left such as "The Farmers' Movement" or "The Labour Movement" or even lesser expressions such as "The New Left" and "The Waffle" of earlier times. But there are many people in community organizations, labour unions, the NDP, co-ops, education and other professions who consider themselves on the left and who act in a variety of ways for left causes.

Threat from the Right

Saskatchewan politics has long been divided between a CCF/NDP party of the left comprised of lower classes versus a fragmented group of parties of the right and more propertied classes. Presently the Liberal Party retains a precarious position on the right. Former Liberals, Conservatives, Social Credit and Reform tendencies are combined (but not unified) in the Saskatchewan Party. The fear of the possible election of this right-wing coalition causes many on the left to accept the "lesser of two evils" approach to the upcoming election. For example, a recent arrival in the province reflected on her previous experience in Nicaragua and Ontario. As she sees it, in both cases the decision of the left to punish a government that reneged on its promises had terrible right-wing consequences.

Would that be the result in Saskatchewan if the left punishes the NDP?

Unlike any other party in Saskatchewan, the NDP is organic. It is rooted in, and its members influence, all the important social formations except the Chamber of Commerce, and even that may no longer be an exception. The other parties are less rooted, representing limited and shallow constituencies with shifting loyalties and purposes. But they thrive on significant dissension between the NDP and its mass base such as 1982 when the Blakeney government squandered its advantage by alienating labour, many of whom refused to work or vote for the party.

What is the NDP Now?

Historically the CCF/NDP was a loose coalition of the farmers' movement, trade unions and organized teachers. These were the same parts of Saskatchewan society that built and ran the co-ops and the network of community groups from arts to sports. Left populist values and perspectives was the glue binding this coalition together: democracy, fair dealing, fiscal rectitude, Christian piety, mutual assistance, healthy communities and social justice. In the past 30 years the glue has dissolved through demographic relocations and economic upheaval, brought on by relentless capitalist reconstruction.

The basis of wealth, the land, is now in fewer hands and tillers are more likely found in the labour market, either because they had to give up farming altogether, or take off-farm jobs to make ends meet on the farm. Today's farmers are more right-wing populist than left. With the exception of the dwindling National Farmers Union,

agrarians are typically foes of the NDP.

The largest trade unions (CUPE and SGEU) are mainly employees of municipal and provincial governments and therefore face the NDP managers of those governments as adversaries. The professionalization of teachers has led to an inward focus and dilution of social consciousness in favour of career related concerns best handled through collective bargaining rather than political action.

Changes in the NDP within the past 20 years have reduced the once crucial reliance on its members. Originally it was the army of members and supporters who conducted the electoral struggle. This gave members some important leverage over policies and candidates. With the move to public relations, advertising and media as the chief tools of election, a more bureaucratized NDP, like the co-ops, has substantially freed itself from discipline by its members. If there is some discontent it is not a problem since it is no longer necessary to rely on members to canvass polls three times. The job can be done effectively through media sound bites. Funding for such a strategy is also separated from the membership now that the NDP welcomes and rewards large corporate contributions.

The Left Routed

While each of these building blocks of the CCF/NDP always contained an ideological spectrum, the left exerted significant influence. That influence was also reflected in the Party as the 30 percent support for the Waffle in the late 1960s indicated. In the 1980s the defeat everywhere of left and progressive policies, most dramatically with the rise of neo-liberal hucksters such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and the collapse of "really existing socialism," was bound to cast its deathly pall over the left in Saskatchewan as well. The Saskatchewan left was no more able to avoid the tidal wave of reaction than socialists elsewhere.

With the important exception of the conflict over uranium policy at the beginning of the decade, the Romanow regime has been spared any important opposition from an internal or external left-wing. Dissenting MLAs Peter Prebble, Ann Smart and Bob Lyons were shoved out. Virtually every respondent in this survey feels the Party has adopted a pro-business, neo-liberal strategy that relegates social democratic attitudes and policies to "the old days,"

useful only in sentimental reminiscences to Party loyalists. Party leaders are viewed as subservient to the global market place, to hi-tech, information-based, economic growth. Dissent and opposition within the ranks is unwelcome. Morale and direction within the civil service is said to be at an all time low. Services and institutions are being

de-regulated, cut back and eliminated to the detriment of the social infrastructure. Intra-party democracy is formal but spiritless since leaders are not bound by their members. And there are particular "horror stories" some respondents tell which justify their disappointment or rejection of the NDP. As one "loyalist" remarked, the Party's been taken over by the business minded and bloody minded, "they make noises like mice but want to be cats."

Some hold the Party responsible for permitting the Wheat Pool to be transformed into a private corporation and for fostering

disastrous corporate hog farming. One of these critics declared that for the first time in his life he would likely not vote. Life-long, active Party members feel there is no longer any inspiration in the NDP to help make the world a better place.

Alternative or No Where to Go?

Yet despite the almost uniform condemnation of the direction of the Romanow regime, there is scant agreement among the left on what alternative there is to voting to return the NDP for a third successive term. The left finds itself without coherence and without an agreed alternative.

This dilemma is fully understood by the professionals who manage the NDP. Whatever discontent the left inside and outside the Party may feel, they have nowhere else to go. So what difference does it make that the left is critical?

Both the old and young within the NDP left express the same view that the solution lies not in the formation of a new left party, but in resolute and loyal struggle for policy changes and the rise of new layers of progressive leadership within the Party. A life-long member like Wally Coates as well as young members such as Dave McGrane and Erin Weir reflect this perspective.

For others there is a clear understanding that the NDP controls the largest single system of employment in Saskatchewan. Careers can depend upon not offending the

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better place.**

potential employer. Whether or not this is true, some respondents fear it may be. For those who have out-of-scope government jobs there is an explicit understanding that appropriate work on behalf of the Party is expected.

The NDP government, like the federal Liberals, prides itself on successive balanced budgets, on successfully reorganizing the health system, on cutting the fat out of the civil service, education and welfare, on managing relations with aboriginal groups and reducing taxes. Yet some on the left see these achievements as the classic accomplishments of so-called good government: relative freedom from corruption, balanced budgets, reduced or minimized spending on "frills" such as welfare, education, health, culture, restraint of organized labour, attention to the needs of business. Such critics point out these are scarcely the priorities of the unemployed, the single parents, the poor, the marginalized, but also some of the working "middle class" who want the NDP to be a beacon of a better future, a more equitable future, a future that is not entirely restricted to the requirements of "the bottom line." The sort of hope that Tommy Douglas evoked.

Reforming from Within

During the past two NDP governments labour has received little reward for their loyalty. The new Trade Union Act was a disappointment as was the Labour Standards legislation. The shuffling of jurisdictions within the reorganized health system has produced widespread discontent. Policies respecting transportation have gutted parts of the private service sector to the disadvantage of employment while devastating the road network. Often government decisions result in unions being cast in conflict with one another, neutralizing their effective opposition and generating frustrating feuds.

For those of the labour left who believe there remains a core of progressive strength within the Party, the left should be attempting to nominate sympathetic candidates and affect Party policy between and during elections. Despite their unrewarding experience and real anger with the Romanow regime, trade unionists of the traditional left will work to get candidates elected. Chris Banting of RWDSU says, as a labour leader he cannot afford to sit aside and denounce politics and politicians. He has a responsibility to his members and to workers generally to try to express their interests.

During 1998, in anticipation of the retirement of sitting members in several Regina ridings, a group of trade unionists organized to nominate labour candidates as replacements. In one riding after another they were thwarted by a combination of skilled opponents with backing from the Party leadership, inter-union rivalry and membership apathy. Nevertheless, when the election is called these labour critics say they will allocate resources selectively to

the most promising and friendly candidates. The justification once again is the Saskatchewan Party alternative is too dreadful. Today many left trade unionists are convinced the task of building a new party is simply too formidable.

Other Left Options

But that is not the view of the left, including trade unionists, who have formed the New Green Alliance. It was launched provincially in 1998 and will field candidates in the 1999 election. Its composition is mainly young workers, environmentalists and students, but with a number of agriculturalists and older veterans of Saskatchewan politics. Neither its members nor anyone else expect the party to elect any candidates, but possibly they will present a meaningful platform in their first election. Many respondents, including card carrying NDPers, declare they will vote for plausible New Green candidates.

Among the left there is a recognition that their own impotence results from the lack of a vehicle – a forum within which some degree of coordination or common purpose could take shape. One expression of this view was a criticism of the fragmented approach of this very investigation. Asking isolated individuals what they think about a left position is a passive approach. Instead, it is argued,



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DROP IN SOON!

the *Briarpatch* collective should have taken a leadership role in formulating and publishing an analysis and position which might then be debated by left activists.

Another criticism addressed the preoccupation with elections themselves. In this view what is needed in Saskatchewan (and elsewhere) is a means to revitalize civic life from the deadening rituals of consumerism, television, the withering privatization of life. Elections address individuals, not communities. One proposal is that in the lead up to an election, the left sponsor non-partisan public forums – *not all-candidates meetings*. The goal would be to encourage a sense of community involvement through an analysis of problems and the consideration of viable alternatives.

The public forums sponsored by Council of Canadian chapters on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the Social Union as well as the Saskatchewan Health Coalition's forum in Swift Current are cited as examples of attempts to re-activate public engagement. Some on the left argue a succession of extra-parliamentary developments such as these forums, opposition to the degradation of farming, anger over the corporate transformation of the Wheat Pool, publication of the Alternative Provincial Budget and creation of the New Green Alliance are evidence of what the Romanow NDP has lost in public support. More, they claim such developments could supply

the content of a people's platform for a left alternative and grass roots activism.

The NDP Machine and Left Criticism

The decline of electoral participation to 64 percent in the 1995 election is cynically explained by NDP professionals as a sign of contentment. Alternatively the drop and the emergence of an explicit non-NDP left may mean that the Party is no longer a legitimate heir; the keeper of the social democratic vision. The function of elections in North America, above all else, is to legitimize class rule. If people choose not to vote it is a reflection of lost legitimacy. Apathy can be a rational response to the absence of meaningful alternatives. The NDP abandonment of vision and its substitution of administrative order is certainly an article of indictment among left opinion.

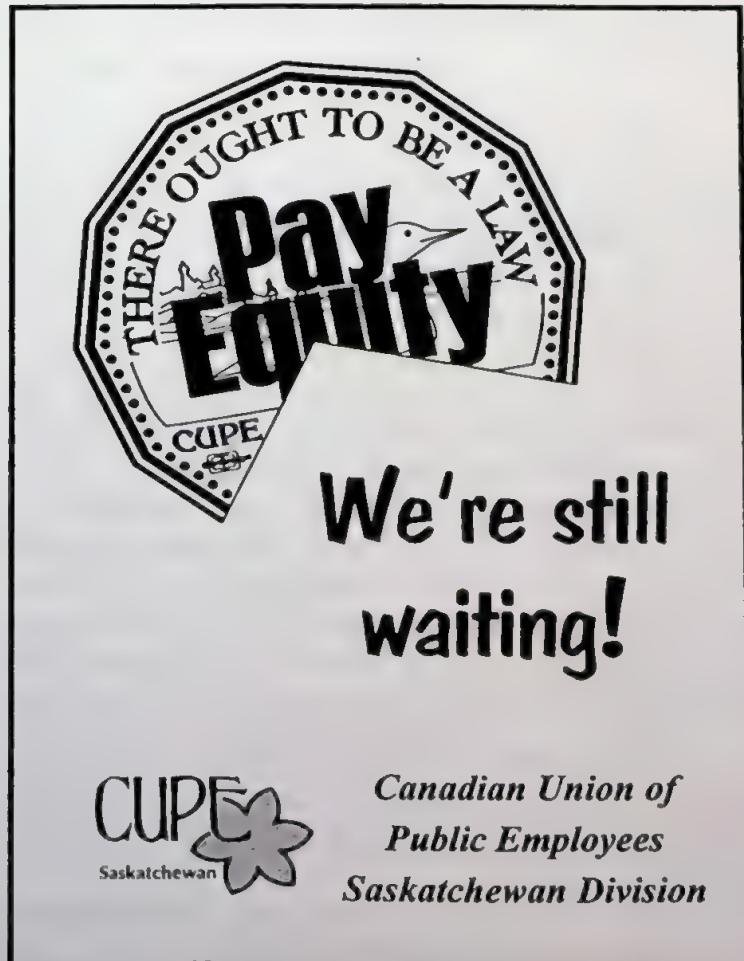
If the criticism from the left and the evidence of its extra-parliamentary resurgence is real and sustained, it will have to be expressed in one or another of the ways described. Successful nomination of left candidates not willing to endorse the regime's management plan is the option of the traditional Party left who retain a conviction that there is a core constituency devoted to non-market values. For the left who are not persuaded by this belief, the Party is more or less the problem.

Respondents point out that if the NGA (or any other left-wing organization) is to survive and grow as a political party it needs a base of support comparable to what the farmers' movement provided in the 1930s and 40s. Organized labour is the logical formation to fill this base-building need by extending its community alliances, but it remains masochistically bound to the NDP. The problem is not unique to Saskatchewan. The British left is faced with the same difficulty with New Labour and the American left has forever faced the dilemma of the Democratic Party.

Conclusion

Most of the left will vote in this election and some will work for NDP candidates for tactical reasons. If the NDP wins, it will affirm Romanow's "third way" strategy. Paradoxically, the NDP has become so distasteful in its present form that a further term in office may cause a disparate left to identify and assert a common purpose. For the left the developments of recent years may generate a self-conscious recognition among individuals of a collective identity and the need for a form of expression. For the present the best hope, expressed as a synthesis of responses to this survey, is that a combination of social movement building and cautious entry into electoral politics is the course to explore.

Joe Roberts is an author and activist.



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APEC

What's next?

by Karen Lalonde

Many Canadians were not even aware of APEC prior to the pepper spray incident.

But APEC really represents other concerns. It is promoted to Canadians as a grouping of 18 economies whose aim is to impose a free trade zone in the Asia-Pacific region. However, there is nothing free about free trade. It is the forced changing of rules to benefit transnational corporations at the expense of people, governments, and the environment.

Treaties take priority and override the sovereignty of a country. For example, Canada's environmental law on the use of MMT was over-ridden by Ethyl Corp. through NAFTA.

Since NAFTA's inception, corporate profits have soared, but the income of the poorest Canadians have dropped by 20 percent. Our social safety net is disintegrating before our eyes. In Canada, corporate contributions to tax revenues have gone from 50 percent in the 1960s to less than eight percent today. Small businesses in Canada continue to fail because they cannot compete with large international corporations which receive large government subsidies and grants, pay little tax, and have access to cheap labour and resources in other countries.

In the APEC world vision, all aspects of our lives are redefined in terms of profitability. A recent APEC concept paper, regarding their view on education, attacks learning and the idea that a critical education can improve our lives. "Education means pre-

paring workers for business." They talk about human and natural resources, not people and the environment. While the world is being made

Treaties take priority and override the sovereignty of a country.

borderless for capital and corporations, human beings remain trapped in poverty.

There is no public debate about issues which will radically alter the way we live. Governments and the APEC Business Advisory Council (which is made up of CEOs), form policies to address their interests. Fundamental decisions are routinely made through institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank.

Renato Rugiero, Director General of the WTO, stated: "We are writing the constitution of a single global economy." Five transnationals alone control 50 percent of the global market in each of seven industries: con-

sumer durables, automotive, airline, aerospace, electronic components, electrical and electronic, steel. The top 200 of these transnational corporations control one-quarter of the world's economic activity.

International corporations wrap themselves in the national flag of their home country to acquire tax breaks, subsidies, and/or to use it as leverage to push for government regulations which promote their marketing plans. They utilize foreign countries for cheap labour and to avoid stricter environmental standards. For example, Formosa Plastics Corp. recently dumped toxic waste containing high levels of mercury in Cambodia because of public protests in Taiwan. Cambodian villagers, unaware of the material's toxicity, have now been displaced from their homes and live as squatters, surviving on donations from the World Food Program.

Stateless corporations are effectively transforming nation states to suit their interests in transnational investment and competitiveness.

Where do we go from here? Unless Canadians want to reconcile themselves to being run by a global elite, their only alternative is to obtain grass-roots control of our sovereignty. It is mandatory that we have a government ruled from the bottom-up rather than our present top-down rule. There is hope, but it is in the hands of grass-roots movements all over the world.

Karen Lalonde is a concerned citizen in Oakbank, Manitoba.



River of Resistance

*Why thousands of people want to shut down the
School of the Americas.*

by Deirdre Kelly

THE RIVER OF RESISTANCE lining the avenue into Ft. Benning, Georgia last November was even mightier than the raging Chattahoochee River, swollen with winter rains. Over 7,000 people came to participate in the ninth annual vigil and civil disobedience action to protest the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA).

The protest, and others like it over the last several years, were directed at pressuring the U.S. government to close the SOA, a training program for Latin American military leaders. Over 60,000 soldiers and officers have graduated since it began more than 50 years ago.

An unsettling number of those graduates have gone on to be implicated in torture, executions, disappearances and murders, including the murders of Archbishop Oscar Romero; the Jesuits, the housekeeper and their daughter; and the more than 900 civilians at El Mozote in El Salvador. A few years ago, the Pentagon was forced to admit that torture manuals, now withdrawn, had been used at the SOA. Lately, graduates of the school are going back to Colombia and Mexico, countries plagued with civil strife and human rights violations.



All these prisoners of conscience were recently released after serving six months in prison.

Maryknoll missionary Roy Bourgeois began the annual protests in 1990. Just a small group of protesters were at Ft. Benning on the first anniversary of the killing of the Jesuits and their co-workers. Now, mounting pressure in

Congress to withdraw funding from the school has resulted in increasingly close votes. However, protesters have paid the heavy price of prison sentences for their apparent success in raising publicity about the school.

Last year alone, 89-year-old Judge Robert Elliott sentenced nearly 30 of last year's protesters to six months in prison for marching onto the base. Over the last nine years, Father Roy Bourgeois has spent over four years in federal prison.

At a related protest last fall, five protesters removed letters from the Welcome to Ft. Benning sign and stencilled in, "School of Torture - School of Shame." They planted crosses around the sign with the names of Latin American martyrs and propped up graphic photographs of the slaughtered Jesuits and their co-workers. Flowers lay among the photographs.

I attended the trial a year ago where these five activists were found guilty of maliciously damaging Ft. Benning's welcome sign. The five protesters were handed out maximum sentences by Judge Elliott and are currently serving them in federal prisons throughout the U.S.

One of them, 70-year-old Father Bill Bichsel from Tacoma, Washington, got 18 months for trespassing and placing a single hand print, dripping with paint and blood, on the welcome sign. When asked why he made the decision to participate in civil disobedience, he replied: "I think the decision came from thinking very deeply about the massacres that have gone on. It came out of my resolve to follow my conscience. Our action was a symbolic way to say, stop the killing."

All Workers Need Unions!!



"I studied hard, paid lots of tuition, got my advanced degree, to teach part time for little pay with no degree of job security."

In Solidarity, CUPE 2419

Academic Assistants at the University of Regina

At last November's demonstration at Ft. Benning, prominent actor Martin Sheen surprised the crowd by announcing his intention to risk arrest and join the protest. He told the cheering crowd, "You all know what I do for a living, but this is what I do to stay alive!"

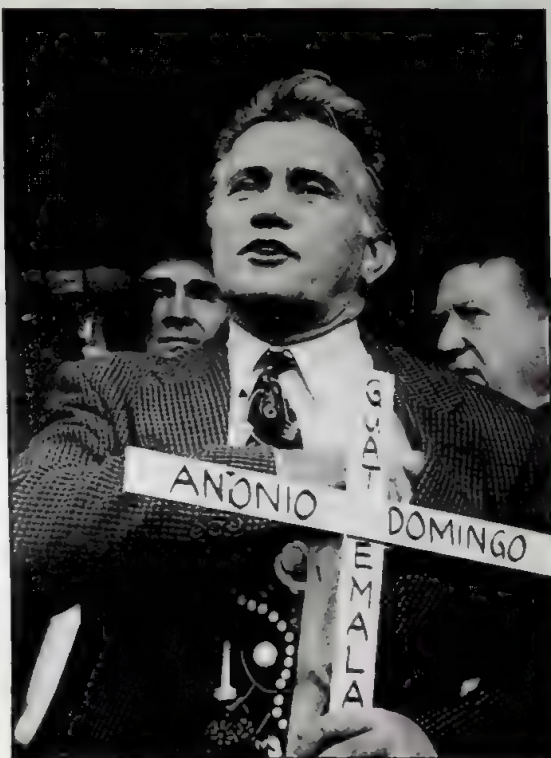
I asked Sheen about his thoughts about the role of non-Americans in the SOA movement. He saw it as very important. "It's not only the U.S. that has benefited from the resources of Latin America. It is up to all of us to speak out against human rights violations done in our names."

Thirty Canadians indignantly challenged the role of the SOA at last year's demonstration. "We too are part of the Americas and the killing is going on in our name," said Bud Godderis, who attended the demonstration from Castlegar, B.C. "It is violating all International Conventions of human rights. U.S. foreign policy in Latin America has and continues to drastically undermine any efforts by international groups that are contributing to that effort."

Father Roy Bourgeois called together all those who were going to participate in the solemn funeral procession. In a subdued tone, he said it was to be held, "In honor of those sisters and brothers throughout Latin America who have been killed, who have been silenced by graduates of the SOA."

Those who were prepared to trespass onto the base carried crosses or coffins. 2,319 crossed onto the base. The rest of the 7,000 waited as the chant of the martyrs was sung out. The call of "Presente!" hung in the air as the river of people moved over the line. As the procession turned the bend, protesters were greeted with lines of military police and army buses lining the road. The view back

was amazing - as far as the eye could see, people were coming, carrying crosses in silence, their measured steps leading them into the arms of the military police.



Actor Martin Sheen

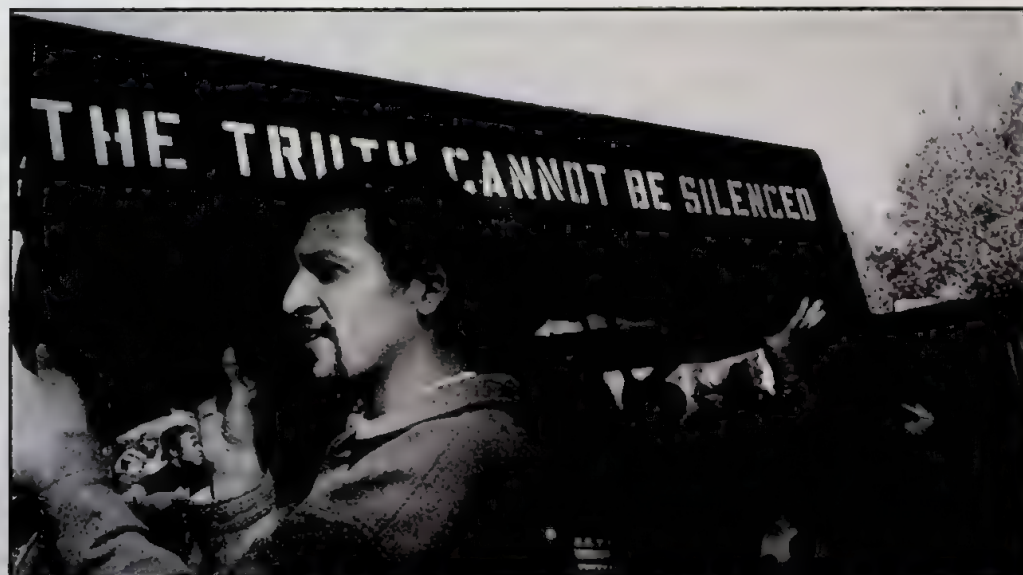
The officers then threw the crosses on a heap at the side of the road along with the coffins. They escorted their prisoners on to the buses. When they were finally loaded, the buses went through the base and out the other end to a park in Columbus. According to an insider, consultation between two generals, the commander of Ft. Benning, and the mayor of Columbus resulted in the decision not to prosecute any of the marchers. However, letters were issued barring them from the post. Individual names were not recorded.

Declaring the event a victory, a jubilant Father Bourgeois danced a jig on

stage. The SOA Watch steering committee declared victory and invited one and all to come to the next action at the White House. From May 1 - 4, people will gather for a vigil at the Pentagon and more civil disobedience actions. U.S. citizens will lobby Congress. Americans and Canadians will be giving a clear message to close the School of the Americas.

For more information contact SOA Watch, PO Box 4566, Washington, DC 20017. Web page: www.soaw.org

In Canada you can contact Deirdre Kelly, c/o SOA-Watch Victoria, #20-1241 Balmoral Rd., Victoria BC V8T 1B2. john_hillian@bcsympatico.ca



Deirdre Kelly is one of the founding members of the Victoria Central America Support Committee. She works in the Social Justice Office in the Victoria Catholic Diocese. She went to the trial in Columbus, Georgia a year ago and, along with her husband John Hillian, went to the vigil in November at Ft. Benning with the generous support of members of SOA-Watch Victoria.

photos pages 22 & 23: Deirdre Kelly

IT'S PAYBACK TIME

In 1990, 87% of jobless Canadians qualified for unemployment insurance benefits. Now, after five years of Liberal "reform," only 36% qualify.



The unemployment insurance (UI) program was created in the 1940s to help people during periods of unemployment. The Chretien government "modernized" the program. Now two out of three unemployed people aren't eligible for UI coverage.

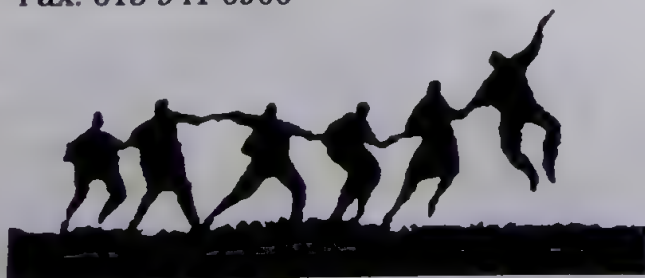
By denying benefits to the jobless, the government has created a \$20 billion surplus in the UI fund. The government has been using the surplus to balance the federal books. Under the renamed Employment Insurance Act, the government must repay the money with interest.

Hundreds of thousands of working people and unemployed Canadians who have financed the UI fund through premiums have a message for the government: ***"It's payback time."*** ***We want the Chretien Liberals to restore benefits to the unemployed, repay the \$20 billion they have borrowed and create an Independent UI Commission.***

If you're concerned about the way the Chretien Liberals are handling the unemployment insurance account, let them know.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Phone: 613-992-4211
Fax: 613-941-6900

Finance Minister Paul Martin
Esplanade Laurier, E. Tower, 21st Floor
140 O'Connor St., Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5
Phone: 613-996-7861
Fax: 613-995-5176



For more information, call the
Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
at 525-0197.



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Margaret Mahood, Regina, SK	Jane Cruikshank, Regina, SK	Ben & Adele Smillie, Saskatoon, SK	Sylvia Pusch, Saskatoon, SK
Maria Fischer, Ladysmith, BC	Len Hurtig, Central Butte, SK	Lee Chalmers, Saint John, NB	H. Keith Ralston, Vancouver, BC
Paul Beach, Ernfold, SK	Ted & Sylvia Walker, Regina, SK	S. & B. Hubick, Regina, SK	Irene Adams, Langenburg, SK
Darin Milo, Regina, SK	Wayne Amos, Oxbow, SK	Richard Bothner, Beechy, SK	Mary Weber, Lumsden, SK
Don Anderson, Regina, SK	Patricia Harris, Moose Jaw, SK	Jeanne Caswell & Allan Colpitts, Abbey, SK	Jan Noppe, Princeton, BC
Regina & District Labour Council, Regina, SK	Jim Holtslander, Saskatoon, SK	Milton Woodard, Saskatoon, SK	David Crossley, Delisle, SK
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			Floyd Howlett, Peterborough, ON

Unsung Lives

The rogues and heroes exhibition in Saskatoon.

by Ruth Millar

Prairie people, it seems, are hungry for true stories of our own heroes of the past, and even our own villains. When the spotlight fell recently on some homegrown but relatively unheralded luminaries, it tweaked a nerve. Maybe it's only because we're weary of having American rogues and heroes rammed down our throats. Or maybe it reflects a growing sense of regional identity, or a new-found appreciation of our own history.

When the photographic exhibition entitled "Rogues, Heroes, Adventurers and Trailblazers" opened February 8, the usual heritage crowd flocked to the Saskatoon Public Library gallery, along with many other interested observers who'd been invited by Local History Room staff. Then the media began to call, first CBC Radio, then three TV networks, two magazines, and one academic journal. Then more curious people trickled into the library to get a look. Soon pages and pages of inscriptions in the gallery guest register applauded these "unsung lives" in Saskatchewan.

The show includes text panels as well as photographs, outlining the lives of 27 extraordinary people. Some were mavericks or firebrands, intrepid and gutsy, or feisty and outrageous. For many, personal passions or obsessions shaped their lives. Some tested their own limits, or were driven by their own outstanding talents or abilities. Most chose their own unusual paths, but for others, serendipity coupled with a swift decision forged their destinies. A hand-



Saskatoon's unlikely spy, Emma Woikin, was a Doukhobor farm wife who became entangled in the sensational Igor Gouzenko espionage trials which helped to launch the Cold War.

photo: PH 98 113 2 courtesy of Fred and Doreen Konkin, Blaine Lake and the Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room.

ful were scoundrels, or worse. All lived fascinating lives.

Among the most intriguing were: an early revolutionary, a one-legged skater, a barnstorming aviatrix, a globe-trotting nurse who nursed in China with Dr. Norman Bethune, an alleged outlaw with links to Jesse James and Buffalo Bill, a Doukhobor farm wife caught up in the Igor Gouzenko espionage case in 1946. Other lives that fascinated people were the former pickpocket who became a general in the Chinese Nationalist Army, a firebrand health crusader, a maverick author and editor, an early woman broadcaster, a shy Doukhobor artist, and a London socialite who became a prairie social activist.

Although all of the "unsung lives" are extraordinary, some might be of particular interest to *Briarpatch* readers:

* Sophia Dixon was a pioneer co-operator and advocate for

farmers and women, who won two Governor-General's Awards, one commemorating the famous Persons' Case.

* Jean Ewen was the intrepid daughter of a feisty revolutionary, who forged her own path and witnessed history as a nurse in China with Dr. Norman Bethune. Her father, Tom McEwen, a destitute Scottish immigrant, rose to become one of Canada's great labour and revolutionary figures.

* Florence McOrmond, Saskatchewan's first woman mayor, was a community organizer, a relief worker and women's advocate in the small railway town of Suther-

land.

* Richard St. Barbe Baker, a peripatetic and visionary "Man of the Trees," crusaded for decades against the plundering of the planet, and for the nurture and maintenance of precious forests.

* Diana Wright, former Olympic skier and Admiral's daughter, was dramatically transformed from an international socialite to a prairie environmentalist and peace activist.

* Her husband, J.F.C. (Jim) Wright, once called "the prairies' most rambunctious, rip-snorting, voluble firebrand," was a journalist and the editor of the *Union Farmer*, and also a Governor-General's Award-winning author.

* Edward Ahenakew has been called "the Crees' own Martin Luther King." He was a spokesperson for his people, a spiritual leader, scholar, and chronicler of historic events and traditional ways.

* Dr. William John McKay was an outspoken medical health officer and crusader for improved sanitation and other public health measures, during and after the dreaded typhoid epidemics in the first decade of the century.

* George Findlay Andrew was a multi-skilled, multilingual teacher, diplomat and missionary, whose efforts in earthquake and famine relief and for refugees earned him an O.B.E.

* Others in the show were trailblazers. Nellie Carson, a "daring young woman in her flying machine," was Saskatchewan's first woman pilot, and established an altitude record. Martha Bowes was the first female radio announcer in Saskatchewan. Dr. Elizabeth Matheson was the first fe-



Martha Bowes was the first female radio announcer in Saskatchewan.

photo: PH 98 103 5 courtesy of Eldred Bowes, and the Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room.



Full-length photo of Nellie Carson and fellow aviatrix in front of a Gypsy Moth.

photo: PH 99 23 courtesy of Ray Crone, and the Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room.

male physician in the province.

The show has its boundaries: the years 1900 to 1950. No living people are included. Celebrities are omitted, except for a few whose lives have been recounted in books, but about whom the local connection is little known. Others are obscure to all but those who knew them. Except for the woman mayor, there are no politicians, nor are there any sports heroes, rock stars, lieutenant-governors or real estate moguls. Such people are already well documented, and streets and parks have been named after them. Nor was the academic world explored, this being the purview of university libraries and archives.

The exhibition was scheduled to come down March 5, but plans are for it to hang for the succeeding 12 months in the auditorium of the J.S. Wood branch in Saskatoon. There is also potential for the exhibition to tour the province.

The Local History Room at the Saskatoon Public Library welcomes donations and loans of photos and life stories of interesting people in history, as do libraries, museums and archives in other provinces.

Ruth Millar, who curated this photo exhibition, is head of the Local History Room at the Saskatoon Public Library. She is also a former journalist.

Downtown Eastside Poems

by Sandy Cameron

The Downtown Eastside is Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood. It has a long history of struggle for human rights. This is the neighbourhood where men and women in B.C. first fought for the eight-hour day and the right to form trade unions. In 1918, Canada's first General Strike took place here to protest the murder of Ginger Goodwin. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployed men fought on these streets for the right to food, shelter, work and wages. Both Chinatown and Japantown have long histories in the struggle for human rights. In 1995, in co-operation

with groups all over Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside helped to defeat a casino megaproject that would have done great harm to both the local community and the City of Vancouver.

Today, the Downtown Eastside is under siege from gentrification. The community is constantly attacked by the mainline media that supports the interests of huge corporate forces which see our area as an urban frontier. When the powerful deny the humanity of human beings and the history of a community, they tend to think they can destroy both the people and the place without moral qualms.

My book of poetry, "Downtown Eastside Poems," was written to express some of the courage and dignity I see every day. This is one of the poems in the booklet.

It can be ordered through your local bookstore. It costs \$5.00. The publisher is Lazara Press, Box 2269 VMPO, Vancouver BC V6B 3W2. Phone: (604) 872-1134. Fax: (604) 874-6661.

Sandy Cameron is a senior citizen and volunteer at the Carnegie Community Centre in Vancouver.

Housing Crisis in the Downtown Eastside

*Old man
alone
in a basement room.
You've outlived your time, you say.
You hope that maybe sleep will come
to end your loneliness.*

*It wasn't always so.
You travelled in our country coast to coast,
and build the bridges crossing wild rivers.
You sweated as a miner,
and like a meteor you came to town
shaken by the bleakness
of the northern camps.*

*You found an old-time boarding house
near Main and Hastings,
and lived with friends*

*until that cunning pack of money makers
destroyed your home,
not caring where you went.
A few just died,
and solved the housing problem in that way.
Some left town.
You wandered to a basement room
alone.*

*I greet you, friend,
and wait to hear the stories you have lived.
Tell me our heritage
that is not found in school books.
Tell me of those who really built this nation.*

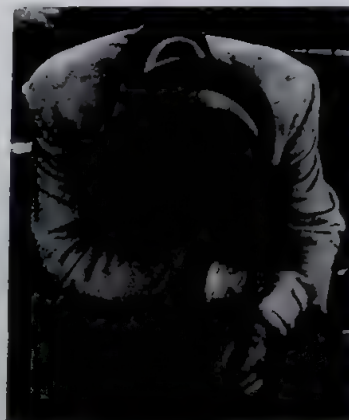


photo:
Elaine Brière

**Slumming it at the Rodeo:
The Cultural Roots of Canada's
Right-Wing Revolution**
by Gordon Laird

Douglas & McIntyre, 1615 Venables
Street, Vancouver BC V5L 2H1
1998, \$19.95.

reviewed by George Manz

Here's your chance to meet Canada's cowboy junkies: Preston Manning, Ralph Klein and Mike Harris. No they're not selling heroin or crack, they're selling something even more deadly: the corporate dream of running government like a business, all the while hiding behind the mask of right-wing populism.

Gordon Laird reveals that today's right-wing populism "appears not from grass-roots protest but from the global frontier of high finance and Big Business - the very institutions against which old-time populists used to rail. With executive takeovers of parliamentary process and hog-tied social programs, today's cowboy populism

is part rebellion and part self-deception: a once-vibrant political legacy that has been wrested from its roots and taken to market."

Laird shows how the Gang of Three Stooges have stage-managed their political careers with the same vigilance as country musicians like achy-breaky heart-throb Garth Brooks. They've built a "we're-just-regular-folks-like-you" image. Klein's famous line, "The bosses are the people. I'm not the boss; I'm just an employee," makes me want to puke.

Meanwhile, Mike Harris, the barnyard buzzard, portrays himself as a man of the people who "will ensure that those good people who are trapped in Welfare, Ontario, will be given an opportunity to make the move to Opportunity, Ontario." Tell that to the poor who've had to try to survive on welfare cuts and workfare.

These clever politicians who pretend to be "in the service of the people," love to line dance on the backs of unionized workers and the poor,

THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF
CANADA'S RIGHT-WING
REVOLUTION

SLUMMING IT
AT THE RODEO



GORDON LAIRD

while in reality serving their corporate masters.

Laird shows how Canadian politics are becoming the equivalent of a fast food outlet: "It promises immediate gratification, good value for minimal nutrition, convenience and nifty gimmicks."

Laird says its easy for people to poke fun at Manning, Klein and Harris, "with their flashy hijinks and fancy footwork. But they are a force to be reckoned with, capable of throwing a real party: not to celebrate, but to cash in on the chaos created by the complexity of modern life."

Deficit cutting, globalization, lower taxes, mean-spiritedness and intolerance of those who are different from the "norm" have become today's "common sense," replacing a more collective approach to overcome society's many problems.

But there is hope. We can and must fight these gunslingers and outlaws or else Mike Harris' words will become true in every part of this country: "Ontario isn't just open for business ... Ontario is business."

George Manz is the editor of Briarpatch.



Jobs Overseas

Agricultural Extension Officer, Thailand
Women's Program Officer, Chile
Marine Biologist, Papua New Guinea
Veterinarian, Tanzania
Investment Coordinator, Solomon Islands
Community Development Worker, Laos

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professionals overseas for two-year contracts in
partnerships for social justice.*

For more information:

www.cuso.org

1 800 267-3847

Challenge to Genocide

Challenge to Genocide:

Let Iraq Live

by Ramsey Clark et al.

International Action Center

39 W. 14th St. #206

New York, NY 10011, USA

phone (212) 633-6646

Email: iacenter@iacenter.org

US\$12.95 plus \$4.00

postage & handling.

reviewed by Terry Wolfwood

This book forces us to face the reality of Iraq, to accept responsibility for the destruction of a whole society, and to join the many others working to end military and economic actions against its people.

The war of 1991 continues in the daily lives of the Iraqi people, even without more bombing (which seems to happen whenever the American president is in domestic trouble). More than 50 writers, including Canadians, Iraqis, Sudanese and Americans from all backgrounds - pastors, doctors, nurses, activists, war veterans, mothers, trade unionists and Clark (a former U.S. Attorney General) - have compiled a horrific record of the suffering of the Iraqi people since "The Gulf War" ended.

They document the destruction of the health, education, agriculture and services infrastructures in what was a developed society with high indicators for quality of life. The book also discusses the result of using depleted uranium in bombs and describes a mysterious infestation of the screwworm fly.

Photos show streets in shambles, hospitals filled with dying children - dying from lack of food and medica-

tion - schools without basic supplies. The photos also show American citizens delivering aid to the Iraqi people, bravely defying the U.S. government and facing possible imprisonment as sanctions-breakers.

One million people, 600,000 of them children, have died as a result of the sanctions. There is a word to describe this: *genocide*. Yes, today, now, every day. And Canadians are part of this. Our government supports these sanctions. Iraq was our fifth-largest customer for grain; now farmers can't sell or even give their wheat to Iraq.

The International Action Center has been a leader in the U.S., challenging sanctions and organizing demonstrations, workshops, political actions, making videos and books like this available, as well as organizing aid and activist delegations to Iraq.

They state: "The IAC is motivated by a broad vision of radical social change as an alternative to the cur-

rent society's class domination by the military-industrial complex ... advancing political consciousness requires telling the truth ... this is a great deal of the work of IAC, especially with regard to Iraq which has been so effectively demonized by the propaganda machine."

Challenge to Genocide: Let Iraq Live should be widely read and distributed. We should donate it to our libraries. We can send copies to politicians. The truth might just set them free of their military corporate blinkers.

To help send medical aid to Iraq, Canadians can contribute to: Campaign to End Sanctions Against the People of Iraq, #405-825 Granville St., Vancouver BC V6Z 1K9. Phone (604) 687-3277.

Terry Wolfwood works for the Barnard-Boecker Centre Foundation in Victoria, B.C.

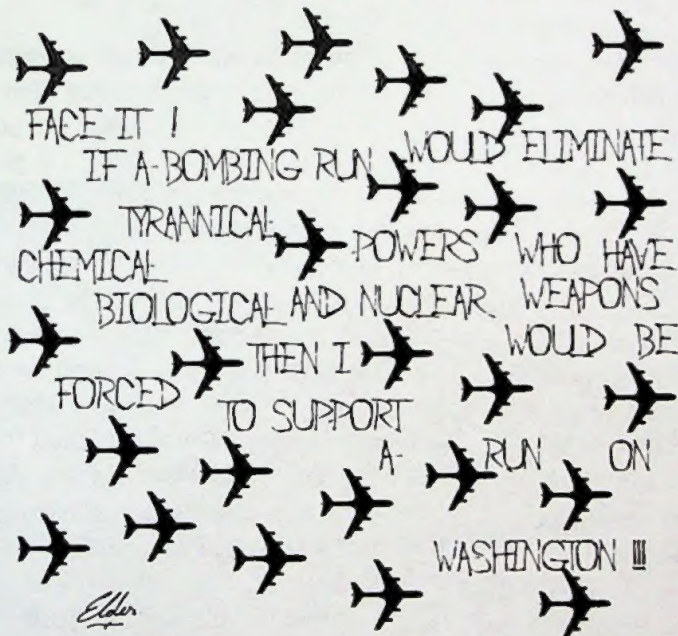


DO AS I SAY...

"It is a trade carried out by profiteers, abetted by corruption, creating a bottomless armory for rogue militias, criminal empires, and bands of thugs."

- Madeline Albright,

U.S. Secretary of State, November 1998. Albright denounced the "unregulated and illegitimate" sale of illegal firearms, yet was strangely silent about the more lucrative "legal" trade in weaponry. In 1997, the U.S. exported \$26 billion worth of "legal" weapons, making it the world's number one weapons dealer, with 43 percent of all weapons exports in the world.



Say What??

SHOP TIL YOU DROP

"The major problem is that nobody gets up on a Saturday morning and says, 'Let's go casket shopping.'"

- Jim St. George,
president and CEO of Consumer Caskets USA, on
the tough times funeral services retailers are
facing.

KILLER DIPLOMACY

"Switzerland is known for diplomacy, but where I'm from diplomacy is something you do after you kill the competition."

- Jeffrey Katz,
the new Swissair CEO who is originally from California.

NEW MATH

"The issue is mathematics. One Reformer plus one Tory equals one Liberal in Parliament."

- Mario Anecchini,
former Tory candidate (who lost) in a 1996 federal
byelection in Etobicoke North. He was one of the
delegates at the United Alternative conference.

DREAM OR NIGHTMARE?

"This is an unprecedented event for the country. Not since the days of Confederation have Canadians of different political backgrounds come together to discuss their common dream of a better future."

- Preston Manning,
leader of the Reform Party of
Canada, one week before the
United Alternative conference
in February.

DIALING FOR TORIES...



RRSP Follies

by Jim Stanford

In a bygone era, our heroes were men and women of action: cowboys, space explorers, grim-faced homicide detectives, hockey stars.

Today, we open the newspaper to check the mutual fund reports, not the hockey scores. We have a new breed of heroes: money managers.

After the 1999 RRSP season lurched to a disappointing conclusion, the spotlight is on those men and women whose livelihood depends on the continued willingness of the investing public to swallow two-percent management expense ratios.

Advertising executives estimate that the financial industry spent about \$125 million on RRSP promotion last season. In a crowded advertising market, some funds are pushing their money managers onto centre stage, hoping to lure in more investors on the strength of their managers' public personae.

Some low-key spots feature safe suits, promoting an aura of safety and reliability during turbulent times. But others are portraying money managers as being cut from the same mould as action heroes of the past.

One retro TV commercial portrays a brave mutual fund manager personally inspecting an early prototype of a jet aircraft. She asks the test pilot to take her up. "But what if it doesn't fly?" someone warns. "Then we don't invest," she grimly replies - happily putting her life on the line for the sake of our portfolios. Money manager as test pilot.

Another spot shows a team of investigators visiting a factory. A fund manager discretely pulls out a Swiss army knife to scrape the grime off an old machine, and finds that it was made in the 1960s - far too long ago for this company to be considered a credible in-

vestment. The ad concludes with the team silhouetted against the setting sun as they stride out of this company's financial life. Money manager as private dick.

How many money managers would really risk their lives to protect our investments? Not many. None had the gumption to even bother visiting Indonesia to see if there really was a billion-dollar gold mine in Busang. Many of them rarely leave their offices.

The recent public concern with mutual fund fees, and the advertising strategies of the funds themselves, raise an important question: what is it that mutual fund managers actually *do*? In theory they pick winners, discover hidden value, and snap up underpriced bargains through their careful sleuthing. In practice mutual fund returns consistently lag average returns in their corresponding benchmark markets.

Let's examine the *Financial Post*'s round-up of 1998 mutual fund performance. Of the 295 large-cap and diversified Canadian equity funds listed, just 109 (barely one-third) matched or beat the total return of the TSE 300 for the year. On average these funds lost more than three percent of their unit value in 1998, almost twice as large as the 1.6 percent decline in the TSE 300 total return index. That negative differential translates into a loss to investors of \$1.1 billion, compared to what they would have received had they simply "bought" the TSE 300.

This underperformance is repeated over time and across markets. Out of 177 large-cap and diversified U.S. equity funds in the *FP* round-up, just 21 (or 12 percent) matched or beat the 1998 rise in the S&P 500. Over time, the TSE 300 total return has outperformed the average Canadian equity mutual fund in seven of the past ten

years. If an investor had put \$1,000 per year over the past decade into the TSE 300, rather than actively managed funds, they would have \$19,275 today - instead of \$17,360 in the typical mutual fund.

Then why do people buy mutual funds? In light of declining mutual fund sales and growing interest in "no-brain" index funds, many investors are apparently asking themselves that very question. Nevertheless, actively managed funds will continue to attract most of the new money.

Now let's compare private mutual funds with the Canada Pension Plan. It only costs about \$200 million per year to administer the whole CPP - a plan which covers virtually every working Canadian. That's barely more than mutual funds spend on *advertising*, and a tiny fraction of the \$7 billion annual cost of administering mutual funds.

Despite their well-hyped problems, the CPP will still pay much larger pensions to most Canadians than they can ever expect to receive from their personal investments. So maybe the CPP has more of an image problem than a fiscal one.

Perhaps the CPP should run TV ads picturing its normally dull actuaries and administrators in various non-traditional action poses: rescuing stranded mountain-climbers, speeding after escaped convicts, cracking the genetic code of a dangerous new virus. This might help to restore public faith in the CPP's traditional role as guarantor of the retirement security of average Canadians. And that faith would surely be more justified than a misplaced confidence in the ability of private money managers to pick winners.

Jim Stanford is an economist with the Canadian Auto Workers.

My Opinion does not necessarily represent the editorial views of Briarpatch. We welcome submissions and encourage any ensuing dialogue.

What the corporations will be buying today.

Our hospitals



Our schools



Our water supply



Our roads



They're on a shopping spree. Snapping up the public services that make our communities work. And while corporations make a tidy profit, we pay the price — lower quality, reduced safety, restricted access and loss of control.

It's time to stop the selloff.

Check www.cupe.ca to get the facts on privatization. Find out why Public Works!

Public!
WORKS.



Canadian Union of Public Employees

BRIARPATCH



**MAY DAY
BENEFIT**

**BLUES
NIGHT**

Wilma Groenen

Blues Band

Saturday, May 1

8 o'clock

The Other Side

2431 - 8th Avenue

\$10 advance

\$12 at the door

for advance tickets please call Briarpatch at 525-2949
co-sponsored by Briarpatch and the Regina & District Labour Council

